

Report and Recommendations of the New York State Bar Association **Task Force on the Civics Convocation**

November 2024

**NYSBA's Civics Convocation "To Safeguard our Democracy:
Making the Case for Civic Education"**

Prepared by the New York State Bar Association's Presidential Task Force on the
2024 Civics Convocation

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**NYSBA’s Civics Convocation "To Safeguard our Democracy:
Making the Case for Civic Education" Report**
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I. Introduction

The New York State Bar Association (NYSBA) convened a groundbreaking convocation titled “To Safeguard our Democracy: Making the Case for Civic Education” on May 9, 2024, at the NYSBA Bar Center in Albany, New York. This event brought together a diverse group of experts, educators, legal professionals, government officials, and students to address the critical importance of civics education in preserving our democracy and to discuss strategies for improving civic education in New York state and beyond.

A. Purpose and objectives of the convocation

The primary purpose of the convocation was to underscore the vital role that civics education plays in maintaining a healthy and vibrant democracy. By bringing together a wide range of stakeholders, the event aimed to foster meaningful discussions, share best practices, and develop actionable recommendations to strengthen civic education in New York State. The convocation’s objectives included:

1. Raising awareness about the current state of civic education and its impact on democratic participation;
2. Identifying challenges and opportunities in providing quality civic education to all students;
3. Showcasing innovative approaches and best practices in civics education from across the nation;
4. Facilitating collaboration among educators, legal professionals, government officials, and community organizations to enhance civic education; and
5. Developing a set of recommendations for NYSBA and other stakeholders to pursue in order to improve civic education in New York State.

B. Importance of civic education for preserving democracy

Civic education serves as the bedrock for informed and active citizenship, which is essential for the preservation and strengthening of our democratic system. By equipping students with a deep understanding of democratic principles, government structures, and their rights and responsibilities as citizens, civic education empowers them to actively participate in the political process, engage in constructive dialogue, and make informed decisions. In an era marked by increasing polarization, misinformation, and declining trust in democratic institutions, the need for robust civic education has never been more pressing. Without a solid foundation in civics, our democracy faces the risk of erosion and the rise of civic disengagement, threatening the very fabric of our society.

C. NYSBA's role in addressing the civic education crisis

As the largest voluntary state bar association in the United States, NYSBA recognizes its unique position and responsibility in addressing the civic education crisis. With a long-standing commitment to promoting the rule of law, access to justice, and the betterment of the legal profession, NYSBA understands the critical role that civic education plays in maintaining a just and stable society. By convening this convocation and bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders, NYSBA aims to spearhead efforts to improve civic education in New York State and serve as a model for other states and organizations nationwide. Through its extensive network of legal professionals, educators, and community partners, NYSBA is well-positioned to advocate for policies, resources, and initiatives that will strengthen civic education and ensure that all students have access to high-quality learning opportunities that prepare them for active and informed citizenship.

II. Executive Summary

The New York State Bar Association (NYSBA) convened a groundbreaking convocation titled “To Safeguard our Democracy: Making the Case for Civic Education” on May 9, 2024, at the NYSBA Bar Center in Albany, New York. The event brought together experts, educators, legal professionals, government officials, and students to address the critical importance of civic education in preserving democracy and to discuss strategies for improving civic education in New York State and beyond.

Key takeaways from the convocation include:

1. Civic education is essential for maintaining a healthy and vibrant democracy by equipping students with a deep understanding of democratic principles, government structures, and their rights and responsibilities as citizens.
2. The current state of civic education in the United States is marked by challenges and gaps in civic knowledge and engagement among young people, highlighting the need for a renewed focus on providing all students with access to high-quality civic learning opportunities.
3. Innovative approaches to civic education, such as interactive learning experiences, project-based learning, and the integration of digital tools can effectively engage students and promote the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and civic engagement skills.
4. Collaboration among educators, legal professionals, policymakers, and community organizations is crucial for creating comprehensive and impactful civic education programs.
5. Equity and access in civic education must be addressed to ensure that all students, regardless of background, have opportunities to develop civic knowledge and skills.
6. The legal profession plays a unique role in advancing civic education by providing expertise, resources, and mentorship to students and educators.

Based on the insights and discussions from the convocation, the Committee on Law, Youth and Citizenship proposes several recommendations for NYSBA to pursue, including:

1. Advocating for increased funding and resources for civic education at the state level.
2. Supporting professional development and training for teachers to effectively teach civic education.
3. Encouraging collaboration between schools, courts, and community organizations to provide hands-on civic learning opportunities for students.

4. Promoting the integration of civic education across all subject areas and grade levels.
5. Developing and disseminating resources and best practices for effective civic education.
6. Engaging in public awareness campaigns to emphasize the importance of civic education for preserving democracy.
7. Collaborating with other state and national organizations to advance civic education initiatives.
8. Advocating for policies at the state and local levels that prioritize civic education.
9. Encouraging the participation of lawyers and legal professionals in civic education efforts, such as guest speaking, mentoring, and volunteering.
10. Regularly assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of civic education initiatives and making necessary adjustments based on feedback and data.

The convocation marked a significant milestone in the ongoing effort to address the civic education crisis in New York State and beyond. NYSBA remains committed to leading the charge in advancing civic education and safeguarding democracy by implementing the recommendations and best practices identified at the convocation and continuing to work closely with partners in the education, legal, and policy communities.

III. Keynote Speeches

The convocation featured a series of keynote speeches delivered by distinguished leaders in the legal, judicial, and educational fields. These speeches set the tone for the event, emphasizing the importance of civic education and providing unique perspectives on the challenges and opportunities in strengthening civic learning and engagement.

A. NYSBA President Richard C. Lewis, Esq.

i. Welcoming remarks

President Richard C. Lewis opened the convocation by warmly welcoming all attendees and expressing his gratitude for their participation in this critical event. He acknowledged the diverse range of experts, educators, legal professionals, government officials, and students present, emphasizing the importance of their collective efforts in addressing the civic education crisis.

ii. Importance of civic education for safeguarding democracy

President Lewis underscored the vital role that civic education plays in safeguarding our democracy. He noted that a well-informed and engaged citizenry is essential for maintaining the health and vitality of our democratic system, and that without a strong foundation in civics, our society faces the risk of increased polarization, misinformation, and civic disengagement.

President Lewis reminded the assembled that “[y]ou can’t just gravitate towards those whose opinions you are aligned with; you have to talk to the people you disagree with. You have to listen and, more importantly, learn from those whose beliefs may be completely opposite of yours. Some of your greatest mentors will be people that you disagree with.”

iii. NYSBA's commitment to improving civic education

President Lewis reaffirmed NYSBA’s unwavering commitment to improving civic education in New York State and beyond. He highlighted the organization’s long-standing dedication to promoting the rule of law, access to justice, and the betterment of the legal profession and emphasized NYSBA’s unique position and responsibility in addressing the civic education crisis.

B. Hon. Mae A. D’Agostino, U.S. District Court Judge, Northern District of New York

i. Personal experiences with engaging students in civic education

Judge D’Agostino shared her personal experiences engaging students in civic education, describing her efforts to create opportunities for young people to learn about the judicial system. She recounted her interactions with students, including visiting classrooms, hosting courthouse tours, and participating in mock trials, highlighting the positive impact these experiences had on students’ understanding and appreciation of the legal system.

ii. Importance of creating opportunities for students to learn about the judicial system

Judge D’Agostino emphasized the importance of creating opportunities for students to learn about the judicial system firsthand. She argued that by providing young people with direct exposure to the workings of the courts and the legal profession, we can help foster a deeper understanding of the rule of law and the role of the judiciary in our democracy.

iii. Need for collaboration between schools, courts and community organizations

Judge D’Agostino stressed the need for collaboration between schools, courts, and community organizations in providing students with meaningful civic education experiences. She called for increased partnerships and resource-sharing among these entities, arguing that by working together, we can create a more comprehensive and impactful approach to civic education.

Judge D’Agostino shared that “[w]hen I go down to [New York] City . . . I always stop and read the words on top of the New York Supreme Court building: ‘The True Administration of Justice is the Finest Pillar of Good Government.’ I believe that, and I love sharing that concept.”

C. Hon. Rowan D. Wilson, Chief Judge of the New York State Court of Appeals

i. Historical context of civic education and its role in democracy

Chief Judge Wilson provided a historical context for civic education, tracing its evolution and highlighting its essential role in the development and maintenance of our democratic system. He discussed the foundational principles of our democracy and the importance of an informed and engaged citizenry in upholding these principles.

ii. Challenges faced by marginalized communities in accessing quality civic education

Chief Judge Wilson addressed the challenges faced by marginalized communities in accessing quality civic education. He noted the disparities in educational resources and opportunities that often exist in underserved communities, and emphasized the need for targeted efforts to ensure that all students, regardless of background, have access to high-quality civic education.

iii. Importance of investing in civic education for all students

Chief Judge Wilson called for increased investment in civics education for all students, arguing that it is a critical component of promoting equity and ensuring the long-term health of our democracy. He stressed the need for resources, training, and support for educators to effectively teach civics, and urged policymakers and stakeholders to prioritize civic education in educational funding and reform efforts.

Chief Judge Wilson pointed out that “[t]he pressures of this moment in history feel acute. Discord and disfunction seem to be the hallmark of 21st century politics, and polarization the hallmark of 21st century society. Myriad studies draw a direct line from a deficiency in civics education for our children to a deficiency in civic engagement when those children grow up.”

D. Justin T. Hubbard, Social Studies Teacher, Salamanca High School

i. Innovative approaches to engaging students in civic education

Justin T. Hubbard, a social studies teacher at Salamanca High School and recipient of the 2022 American Civic Education Teacher Award, shared his innovative approaches to engaging students in civic education. He described his efforts to create interactive, project-based learning experiences that allow students to explore real-world issues and develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and civic engagement skills.

ii. Importance of administrative support and community involvement

Mr. Hubbard emphasized the importance of administrative support and community involvement in creating a conducive environment for effective civic education. He discussed the role of school leaders in fostering a culture that values civic learning and engagement and highlighted the benefits of partnering with community organizations to provide students with authentic learning experiences.

iii. Need for teacher training and resources to effectively teach civics

Mr. Hubbard stressed the need for comprehensive teacher training and resources to effectively teach civics in the classroom. He argued that providing educators with professional development opportunities, access to high-quality instructional materials, and support for implementing innovative teaching strategies is essential for improving the quality and impact of civic education.

IV. Panel 1: The National Landscape for Civic Education

The first panel of the convocation focused on the national landscape of civic education, bringing together experts from leading organizations dedicated to promoting civic learning and engagement. The panelists discussed the current state of civic education in the United States, shared insights on federal initiatives and investments, and explored the role of non-profit organizations and the legal profession in advancing civic education.

A. Moderator: Hon. Christopher Riano, Center for Civic Education

Christopher Riano, the President of the Center for Civic Education, served as the moderator for this panel. He introduced the panelists and facilitated the discussion, ensuring that each speaker had the opportunity to share their perspectives and insights on the national landscape of civic education.

B. Panelists

i. David Bobb, Bill of Rights Institute

David Bobb, President of the Bill of Rights Institute, discussed his organization's efforts to promote constitutional literacy and civic engagement among students and educators. He shared examples of the institute's programs and resources, which aim to foster a deeper understanding of the principles and values enshrined in the U.S. Constitution.

ii. Emma Humphries, iCivics

Emma Humphries, Chief Education Officer at iCivics, discussed the role of digital learning tools in promoting civic education. She highlighted iCivics's innovative online games and resources, which engage students in interactive learning experiences that help them understand the workings of government and the importance of civic participation.

iii. Andrew Wilkes, Generation Citizen

Andrew Wilkes, Chief Policy and Advocacy Officer at Generation Citizen, discussed his organization's efforts to promote action civics – an approach that empowers young people to engage in real-world problem-solving and civic action. He shared examples of Generation Citizen's programs, which partner with schools and communities to provide students with authentic civic learning experiences.

iv. Verneé Green, Mikva Challenge

Verneé Green, Chief Executive Officer of Mikva Challenge, discussed her organization's work to promote youth civic engagement and leadership development. She shared examples of Mikva Challenge's programs, which provide young people with opportunities to participate in the democratic process, develop their voice, and make a positive impact in their communities.

C. Key discussion points

i. Current state of civic education in the United States

The panelists discussed the current state of civic education in the United States, noting the challenges and gaps in civic knowledge and engagement among young people. They highlighted the need for a renewed focus on civics education and the importance of providing all students with access to high-quality civic learning opportunities.

ii. Federal initiatives and investments in civic education

The panelists explored federal initiatives and investments in civic education, discussing the role of government in promoting civic learning and engagement. They highlighted recent legislative efforts, such as the Civics Secures Democracy Act, and discussed the potential impact of increased federal funding and support for civics education programs.

iii. Role of non-profit organizations in promoting civic education

The panelists discussed the critical role that non-profit organizations play in promoting civic education and filling gaps in the formal education system. They shared examples of successful programs and partnerships, and emphasized the importance of collaboration between non-profit organizations, schools, and communities in advancing civic education.

iv. Importance of diverse approaches to civic education

The panelists emphasized the importance of diverse approaches to civic education, recognizing that different strategies and methods may be effective in engaging different student populations. They discussed the value of experiential learning, project-based learning and digital tools in promoting civic knowledge and skills and highlighted the need for a range of resources and support to meet the diverse needs of students and educators.

v. Role of the legal profession in advancing civic education

The panelists explored the role of the legal profession in advancing civic education, discussing the unique perspectives and expertise that lawyers and legal professionals can bring to the field. They emphasized the importance of partnerships between the legal community, educators, and civic

organizations in promoting civic literacy and engagement, and discussed potential strategies for increasing the involvement of legal professionals in civic education efforts.

V. Panel 2: Civic Education in New York State

The second panel of the convocation focused on the state of civic education in New York, bringing together key stakeholders from the education, government, and non-profit sectors. The panelists discussed current initiatives, challenges, and opportunities for improving civic education in the state and explored strategies for ensuring that all students have access to high-quality civic learning experiences.

A. Moderator: Elizabeth Benjamin, Marathon Strategies

Elizabeth Benjamin, Managing Director at Marathon Strategies, served as the moderator for this panel. She introduced the panelists and guided the discussion, ensuring that each speaker had the opportunity to share their perspectives and insights on civic education in New York State.

B. Panelists

i. Dr. Betty A. Rosa, Commissioner of Education, New York State Education Department

Dr. Betty A. Rosa, Commissioner of Education and President of the University of the State of New York, discussed the New York State Education Department's efforts to promote civic education. She highlighted recent initiatives, such as the Seal of Civic Readiness, and discussed the department's goals and strategies for improving civic learning and engagement in the state.

ii. Dr. Lester W. Young, Jr., Chancellor, New York State Board of Regents

Dr. Lester W. Young, Jr., Chancellor of the New York State Board of Regents, discussed the board's role in shaping education policy and promoting civic education in the state. He emphasized the importance of equity and access in civic education and discussed the board's efforts to ensure that all students, regardless of background, have opportunities to develop civic knowledge and skills.

Dr. Young observed: "There are some communities where, when we talk to young people about their education, we are very quick to say to them to use their education as a way out of their community, and I think that is a huge error, a huge mistake, because your education should be a way in. . . . The whole purpose of civic education is how do we encourage young people to participate in the public life of their community to make things better."

iii. Hon. Shelley B. Mayer, Chair of Committee of Education, New York State Senate

Hon. Shelley B. Mayer, Chair of the Committee on Education in the New York State Senate, discussed legislative efforts to support and improve civics education in the state. She highlighted recent bills and initiatives, such as the proposed requirement for a semester of civic education in middle school, a new law mandating every NY state high school have a student government and discussed the role of policymakers in advancing civic education.

iv. Dr. Jonathan E. Collins, Center for Educational Equity, Teachers College, Columbia University

Dr. Jonathan E. Collins, Associate Director of the Center for Educational Equity at Teachers College, Columbia University, discussed the importance of equity and cultural responsiveness in civic education. He highlighted research on best practices for engaging diverse student populations and emphasized the need for civic education to be relevant and meaningful to students' lives and experiences.

Dr. Collins suggested to the students present that “[w]e need to treat democracy as a verb. I think we are more fixated on whether or not we are living in a democracy instead of focusing on what are the acts that make us a democracy.”

v. Nicholas D’Amuro, Instructional Coordinator, Genesee Valley BOCES

Nicholas D’Amuro, Instructional Coordinator at Genesee Valley BOCES, discussed the role of BOCES (Boards of Cooperative Educational Services) in supporting civic education in New York State. He shared examples of successful programs and partnerships, and emphasized the importance of collaboration between schools, communities, and organizations in promoting civic learning and engagement.

C. Key discussion points

i. New York State’s initiatives to improve civic education

The panelists discussed recent initiatives to improve civic education in New York State, such as the Seal of Civic Readiness and proposed legislative requirements for civic coursework. They highlighted the importance of a coordinated, statewide approach to promoting civic learning and engagement, and discussed the roles of various stakeholders in advancing these efforts.

ii. Defining and achieving “civic readiness”

The panelists explored the concept of “civic readiness,” discussing what it means for students to be prepared for active and informed citizenship. They emphasized the importance of not only

knowledge but also skills and dispositions, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to engage in civil discourse and collaborative action.

iii. Preparing current and future teachers to teach civics effectively

The panelists discussed the need for comprehensive teacher preparation and professional development in civic education. They highlighted the importance of providing educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources to effectively engage students in civic learning, and discussed strategies for improving teacher training and support in this area.

iv. Addressing inequities in access to quality civic education

The panelists explored issues of equity and access in civic education, discussing the disparities that exist in opportunities for civic learning and engagement across different student populations and communities. They emphasized the need for targeted efforts to address these inequities and discussed strategies for ensuring that all students have access to high-quality civic education.

v. New York State's role in leading the nation in civic education efforts

The panelists discussed New York State's potential to serve as a leader and model for civics education reform nationwide. They highlighted the state's unique strengths and resources, such as its diverse population, strong education system, and commitment to equity and social justice and explored ways in which New York can leverage these assets to advance civic education both within the state and beyond.

VI. Remarks by Hon. Sonia Sotomayor, Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court

One of the highlights of the convocation was the special appearance by Hon. Sonia Sotomayor, Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Justice Sotomayor delivered remarks emphasizing the importance of civic education and the role of the judiciary in promoting civic engagement. She also answered questions from students, providing valuable insights and inspiration for the next generation of informed and active citizens.

A. Importance of engaging students in civic education

Justice Sotomayor emphasized the critical importance of engaging students in civic education from an early age. She discussed the need for schools to provide students with opportunities to learn about government, the rule of law, and the principles of democracy, and to develop the skills and dispositions necessary for active and informed citizenship. Justice Sotomayor stressed that civic education should be interactive, relevant, and empowering, enabling students to see themselves as agents of change and contributors to their communities and the nation.

B. Role of the judiciary in promoting civic education

Justice Sotomayor discussed the unique role that the judiciary can play in promoting civic education and civic engagement. She highlighted the importance of public trust and understanding of the judicial system and emphasized the need for judges and courts to be accessible, transparent, and responsive to the communities they serve. Justice Sotomayor shared examples of initiatives and programs that courts across the country have undertaken to educate the public about the role and functions of the judiciary, such as courthouse tours, mock trials, and community outreach events.

C. Responses to student questions

Following her remarks, Justice Sotomayor engaged in a question-and-answer session with students from various schools and organizations in attendance. The students posed thoughtful and insightful questions on a range of topics related to civics education, social justice, and the role of the courts in American democracy. Justice Sotomayor provided candid and inspiring responses, drawing on her personal experiences as well as her legal expertise. She encouraged the students to be active and engaged citizens, to stand up for their beliefs and values, and to work towards creating a more just and equitable society. Justice Sotomayor's interactions with the students underscored the importance of intergenerational dialogue and mentorship in promoting civic engagement and leadership.

Justice Sotomayor left this important message with the students and all assembled: "My vision of civic participation is not just participation in government or political work, but in small and big projects that can make the world better. It's in thinking about each action that we take every day, every step of kindness that we extend to another person, in every moment that we spend with someone who needs companionship, in every activity that we choose to do, just because it's the right thing to do. We help make our communities better; we help to build that better world."

Justice Sotomayor's participation in the convocation was a powerful testament to the importance of civic education and the role of the judiciary in promoting informed and active citizenship. Her remarks and engagement with students left a lasting impression on all in attendance, and served as a call to action for educators, policymakers, and citizens alike to prioritize civic education as a cornerstone of a healthy democracy.

VII. Panel 3: Where Do We Go From Here?

The final panel of the convocation focused on charting a path forward for civic education in New York State and beyond. The panelists, representing diverse perspectives from education, advocacy, and student leadership, discussed the effectiveness of current initiatives, identified areas for improvement, and proposed recommendations for advancing civic education in the future.

A. Moderator: Jay Worona, Esq., New York State School Boards Association

Jay Worona, Deputy Executive Director and General Counsel of the New York State School Boards Association, served as the moderator for this panel. He introduced the panelists and facilitated the discussion, encouraging a forward-looking and action-oriented conversation on the future of civic education.

B. Panelists

i. Justin T. Hubbard, Social Studies Teacher, Salamanca High School

Justin T. Hubbard, a social studies teacher at Salamanca High School and recipient of the 2022 American Civic Education Teacher Award, shared his perspectives on the effectiveness of current civic education initiatives and the challenges faced by educators in the classroom. He emphasized the importance of teacher training, resources, and support in implementing high-quality civics education, and discussed strategies for engaging students in authentic and meaningful civic learning experiences.

ii. Melinda Person, President, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT)

Melinda Person, President of the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), discussed the role of teachers' unions in advocating for and supporting civic education. She highlighted the need for comprehensive professional development, curricular resources, and funding to ensure that all educators are equipped to teach civics effectively. Person also emphasized the importance of collaboration between teachers, administrators, and policymakers in advancing civic education reforms.

iii. Dr. L. Oliver Robinson, Superintendent of Schools, Shenendehowa Central School District

Dr. L. Oliver Robinson, Superintendent of Schools for the Shenendehowa Central School District, discussed the role of school district leadership in prioritizing and implementing civic education initiatives. He shared examples of successful programs and practices in his district and emphasized the importance of community partnerships, student voice, and equity in promoting civic learning and engagement.

iv. Student representatives

The panel also included student representatives from various schools and organizations, who shared their perspectives on the current state of civic education and their hopes for the future. The students discussed the importance of relevant, engaging, and empowering civic education experiences and emphasized the need for student voice and leadership in shaping educational policies and practices.

C. Key discussion points

i. Effectiveness of current civic education initiatives

The panelists discussed the strengths and limitations of current civic education initiatives in New York State and nationwide. They highlighted successful programs and practices, such as the Seal of Civic Readiness and project-based learning, while also identifying areas for improvement, such as the need for greater consistency, support, and resources across schools and districts.

ii. Goals and recommendations for the future of civic education

The panelists proposed a range of goals and recommendations for advancing civic education in the future. These included increasing funding and resources for civic education programs, expanding professional development opportunities for educators, developing high-quality curricular materials and assessments, and fostering greater collaboration between schools, communities, and organizations.

iii. Importance of student voices and experiences in shaping civic education

The panelists emphasized the critical importance of student voices and experiences in shaping the future of civic education. They discussed strategies for engaging students as partners and leaders in educational decision-making and highlighted the need for civic education to be relevant, responsive, and empowering to diverse student populations.

iv. Role of teachers, administrators, and school boards in advancing civic education

The panelists explored the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in advancing civic education, including teachers, administrators, and school boards. They discussed the need for collaborative leadership, shared vision, and a commitment to continuous improvement in promoting high-quality civic education for all students.

v. Collaboration between schools, community organizations, and the legal profession

The panelists emphasized the importance of collaboration and partnerships in advancing civic education. They discussed the potential for schools to work with community organizations, legal professionals, and other stakeholders to provide students with authentic civic learning experiences, mentorship opportunities, and exposure to diverse perspectives and careers in public service.

The panel on "Where Do We Go From Here?" provided a platform for diverse stakeholders to share their insights, experiences, and recommendations for the future of civic education. The discussion highlighted the need for a comprehensive, collaborative, and student-centered approach to civic education reform and emphasized the importance of continued advocacy, investment, and innovation in preparing all students for informed and engaged citizenship.

VIII. Recommendations for NYSBA to Pursue

Based on the insights and discussions from the convocation, the Committee on Law, Youth and Citizenship proposes the following recommendations for the New York State Bar Association (NYSBA) to pursue in order to improve the state of civic education in New York State.

A. Advocate for increased funding and resources for civic education at the state level

NYSBA should actively advocate for increased funding and resources for civic education programs, curricula, and professional development at the state level. This includes working with policymakers, education leaders, and other stakeholders to prioritize civic education in budget allocations and educational initiatives. These policymakers, leaders, and stakeholders are groups such as the New York State United Teachers Association (NYSUT), the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA), the New York State Council of School Superintendent (NYSCOSS), the State Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS), and the New York State Education Department (NYSED).

B. Support professional development and training for teachers to effectively teach civics

NYSBA should support efforts to provide comprehensive professional development and training for teachers to effectively teach civics. This includes partnering with education organizations, universities, and other experts to develop and deliver high-quality training programs that equip teachers with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to engage students in meaningful civic learning.

C. Encourage collaboration between schools, courts, and community organizations to provide hands-on civic learning opportunities for students

NYSBA should encourage and facilitate collaboration between schools, courts, and community organizations to provide students with hands-on civic learning opportunities. This includes supporting programs such as courthouse tours, mock trials, and internships that allow students to experience the legal system firsthand and interact with legal professionals.

D. Promote the integration of civic education across all subject areas and grade levels

NYSBA should advocate for the integration of civic education across all subject areas and grade levels, recognizing that civic knowledge and skills are relevant and important beyond the social studies classroom. This includes working with education leaders and policymakers to develop interdisciplinary approaches to civics education and to ensure that civic learning is a priority throughout the K-12 curriculum.

E. Develop and disseminate resources and best practices for effective civic education

NYSBA should develop and disseminate resources and best practices for effective civic education, drawing on the expertise of its members and partners in the legal and education communities. This includes creating guides, lesson plans, and other materials that support high-quality civic instruction and assessment, and sharing these resources widely with educators, schools, and districts across the state.

F. Engage in public awareness campaigns to emphasize the importance of civic education for preserving democracy

NYSBA should engage in public awareness campaigns to emphasize the importance of civic education for preserving democracy. This includes leveraging its platform and networks to promote the value of informed and engaged citizenship and to build public support for policies and practices that prioritize civic education.

G. Collaborate with other state and national organizations to advance civic education initiatives

NYSBA should collaborate with other state and national organizations, such as the Center for Civic Education, iCivics, The Honorable Robert A. Katzmann Justice For All Courts and Community Initiative, state and local bar associations, and the American Bar Association, to advance civic education initiatives and to share resources and best practices. This includes participating in joint advocacy efforts, conferences, and other events that bring together diverse stakeholders committed to improving civic education.

H. Advocate for policies that prioritize civics education and address inequities in access to quality civic education

NYSBA should advocate for policies at the state and local levels that prioritize civic education and address inequities in access to quality civics education. This includes supporting measures such as the Seal of Civic Readiness, requirements for civic coursework, and targeted funding and resources for underserved schools and communities.

I. Encourage the participation of lawyers and legal professionals in civic education efforts, such as guest speaking, mentoring, and volunteering

NYSBA should encourage the participation of lawyers and legal professionals in civic education efforts, recognizing the unique role that the legal community can play in promoting civic knowledge and engagement. This includes organizing and supporting opportunities for lawyers to serve as guest speakers, mentors, and volunteers in schools and youth organizations, and to share their expertise and experiences with students and educators.

J. Regularly assess and evaluate the effectiveness of civic education initiatives and make necessary adjustments based on feedback and data

NYSBA should commit to regularly assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of civic education initiatives and making necessary adjustments based on feedback and data. This includes working with researchers, educators, and other partners to collect and analyze data on student outcomes, teacher practices, and program implementation, and using this information to inform ongoing improvement efforts and policy recommendations.

By pursuing these recommendations, NYSBA can play a critical role in advancing civic education in New York State and in helping to create a more informed, engaged, and empowered citizenry. The Committee on Law, Youth and Citizenship believes that these efforts are essential for preserving and strengthening our democracy and urges NYSBA to make civic education a top priority in the years ahead.

IX. Conclusion

The New York State Bar Association’s convocation, “To Safeguard our Democracy: Making the Case for Civic Education,” marked a significant milestone in the ongoing effort to address the civic education crisis in New York State and beyond. By bringing together a diverse group of experts, educators, policymakers, legal professionals, and students, the convocation provided a platform for meaningful dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and collective action.

A. Recap of the convocation’s key takeaways and recommendations

The convocation highlighted the urgent need for a renewed commitment to civic education as a cornerstone of a healthy democracy. Participants emphasized the importance of providing all students with access to high-quality, engaging, and empowering civics learning experiences, and discussed a range of strategies and best practices for achieving this goal. Key recommendations emerging from the convocation included increasing funding and resources for civic education, supporting professional development for teachers, fostering collaboration between schools and community partners, integrating civics across the curriculum, and advocating for policies that prioritize and support civic education.

B. Importance of continued efforts to improve civics education in New York State and beyond

The convocation underscored the critical importance of continued efforts to improve civic education in New York State and nationwide. Participants recognized that the challenges facing civics education are complex and multifaceted and that progress will require sustained commitment, collaboration, and innovation from all stakeholders. By working together to advance

the recommendations and best practices identified at the convocation, educators, policymakers, legal professionals, and community members can help to create a more informed, engaged, and empowered citizenry, and to safeguard the future of our democracy.

C. NYSBA’s commitment to leading the charge in advancing civic education and safeguarding democracy

The New York State Bar Association remains firmly committed to leading the charge in advancing civic education and safeguarding democracy. As the largest voluntary state bar association in the nation, NYSBA recognizes its unique responsibility and opportunity to serve as a catalyst for change and to use its platform and resources to promote the importance of informed and engaged citizenship. By implementing the recommendations and best practices identified at the convocation, and by continuing to work closely with partners in the education, legal, and policy communities, NYSBA can help to ensure that all students in New York State and beyond receive the high-quality civic education they need and deserve.

“To Safeguard our Democracy: Making the Case for Civic Education” marked an important step forward in the ongoing effort to address the civic education crisis and to create a more informed, engaged, and empowered citizenry. As the convocation made clear, however, this work is far from finished. It will require the ongoing dedication, collaboration, and support of all stakeholders – from educators and students to lawyers and policymakers – to ensure that civics education remains a top priority in the years ahead. The New York State Bar Association is proud to be at the forefront of this effort and looks forward to continuing to work with its partners to advance the cause of civics education and to safeguard the future of our democracy.